## CLAIMS

We claim:

1.     A method performed by a computer of rating a computer system's ability

5   to run software applications, wherein the rating facilitates matching of software

application requirements with computer system capabilities, the method comprising:

performing an inventory of the computer system, wherein the performing an

inventory yields a set of computer system features;

testing performance of the computer system, wherein the testing yields

10   performance results for the set of computer system features;

comparing the set of computer system features and the performance results

with capability rating requirements, wherein the capability rating requirements comprise

a required set of features and required performance criteria; and

determining a capability rating for the computer system based on the

15   comparing.


2.     The method of claim 1 wherein the performing an inventory includes

performing an inventory of hardware components in the computer system.


20   3.     The method of claim 2 wherein the performing an inventory further

includes performing an inventory of features of the hardware components.


4.     The method of claim 1 wherein the computer system comprises

components, and wherein the capability rating is based on a lowest component rating

25   among the components.


5.     The method of claim 1 wherein the capability rating requirements are

established by a board comprising voting members.

6.      The method of claim 1 further comprising assigning the capability rating to the computer system.

7.      The method of claim 1 wherein the capability rating is an integer

5    number.

8.      The method of claim 6 further comprising presenting the capability rating in a standardized rating presentation.

10      9.      The method of claim 1 wherein the acts are performed in an operating system environment of the computer system as a feature of the operating system environment.

10.     The method of claim 1 wherein the acts are performed by a capability

15   tool.

11.     The method of claim 10 wherein the capability tool is a software program obtained from a remote computer via a network.

20      12.     The method of claim 10 wherein the capability tool is a software program run from a remote computer via a web browser interface.

13.     The method of claim 1 wherein the capability rating requirements are obtained over a network from a database.

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14.     The method of claim 1 wherein the capability rating requirements are obtained from a storage medium in the computer system.

15.     The method of claim 1 wherein the capability rating is further based on a

30   category for the software applications, the category selected from a group comprising:

entertainment software, computer-assisted drafting software, operating system
software, image processing software.

16.     The method of claim 1 wherein the capability rating is associated with a
5    vendor identifier for the computer system.

17.     A computer-readable medium having stored thereon computer-
executable instructions for causing a computer to perform the method of claim 1.

10          18.     A method of communicating a capability rating for a computer product,
the method comprising:
        assigning a capability rating to the computer product, wherein the assigning
comprises associating a standard presentation of the capability rating with the
computer product, and wherein the capability rating is determined by a computer-
15    executed capability tool.

19.     The method of claim 18 wherein the associating a standard presentation
of the capability rating is performed under a licensing agreement.

20          20.     The method of claim 18 wherein the standard presentation of the
capability rating comprises an integer number representing the capability rating.

21.     The method of claim 18 wherein the standard presentation of the
capability rating comprises a minimum capability rating and a recommended capability
25    rating.

22.     The method of claim 18 wherein the computer product is a computer
hardware product.

23.     The method of claim 18 wherein the computer product is a computer software product.

24.     A method of rating a capability of one or more computer systems to run software applications, the method comprising:

creating proposed capability rating level requirements, wherein the proposed capability rating level requirements comprise computer system performance criteria;

creating finalized capability rating level requirements based on the proposed capability rating level requirements; and

determining a capability rating level for one or more computer hardware devices based on the finalized capability rating level requirements and analysis of the one or more computer hardware devices, wherein the analysis is performed on a computer running a capability tool.

25.     The method of claim 24 further comprising, prior to the creating finalized capability rating level requirements, receiving analysis of the proposed capability rating level requirements;

wherein finalized capability rating level requirements are further based on the analysis of the proposed capability rating level requirements.

26.     The method of claim 25 wherein the analysis of the proposed capability rating level requirements is provided to a ratings board by a review group, and wherein the creating finalized capability rating level requirements is performed by the ratings board.

27.     The method of claim 26 wherein the ratings board comprises voting members.

28.     The method of claim 24 wherein the determining is performed by a testing organization.

29.   The method of claim 24 further comprising repeating the acts of creating proposed capability rating level requirements and creating finalized capability rating level requirements to produce finalized capability rating level requirements for a

5   plurality of capability rating levels.


30.   A method performed by a computer of rating a computer hardware component, wherein the computer hardware component is operable to perform functions in a computer system, and wherein the functions are useful for running

10   software applications on the computer system, the method comprising:
           performing an inventory of the computer hardware component, wherein the performing an inventory yields a set of computer hardware component features;
           testing performance of the computer hardware component, wherein the testing yields performance results for the set of computer hardware component features;

15           comparing the set of computer hardware component features and the performance results with capability rating requirements; and
           determining a capability rating for the computer hardware component based on the comparing.


20   31.   The method of claim 30 wherein the capability rating is based on a lowest feature rating among the set of computer hardware component features.


32.   The method of claim 30 wherein the capability rating is an integer number.

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33.   The method of claim 30 wherein the capability rating requirements are established by a rating requirements decision-making organization.


34.   The method of claim 30 further comprising assigning the capability

30   rating to the computer hardware component.

35. The method of claim 34 further comprising presenting the capability rating in a standardized rating presentation.

5     36. The method of claim 30 wherein the acts are performed in an operating system environment of the computer system as a feature of the operating system environment.

37. The method of claim 30 wherein the acts are performed by a capability
10   tool.

38. The method of claim 30 wherein the capability rating requirements are obtained from a device driver signature for the computer hardware component.

15     39. The method of claim 30 wherein the capability rating is associated with a vendor identifier for the computer hardware component.

40. A computer-readable medium having stored thereon computer-executable instructions for causing a computer to perform the method of claim 30.
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41. A method of rating one or more software applications for execution on a computer system, the method comprising:

creating a proposed rating level, wherein the proposed rating level is based on computer system performance requirements for running the one or more software
25   applications on the computer system;

receiving analysis of the proposed rating level;

creating a finalized rating level based on the proposed rating level and the analysis of the proposed rating level; and

assigning the finalized rating level to the one or more software applications, wherein the assigning is based on computer-executed performance testing of the one or more software applications;

wherein the finalized rating level matches a capability rating level for a

5    computer system.


42.      A method of rating one or more software applications for execution on a computer system, the method comprising:

determining a rating level for one or more software applications, wherein the

10    determining is based on computer-executed performance testing of the one or more software applications, and wherein the rating level is based on computer system performance requirements for running the one or more software applications on the computer system; and

assigning the rating level to the one or more software applications.

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43.      The method of claim 42 wherein the rating level is a minimum rating level.


44.      The method of claim 42 wherein the rating level is a recommended

20    rating level.


45.      The method of claim 42 wherein the rating level is a works-best rating level.


25    46.      A software system for rating a computer system's ability to run software applications, the software system comprising:

means for performing an inventory of the computer system, to yield a set of computer system features;

means for testing performance of the computer system, to yield performance

30    results for the set of computer system features;

means for comparing the set of computer system features and the performance results with capability rating level requirements; and

means for determining a capability rating level for the computer system based on the comparing.

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47.    A software system for rating a computer system's ability to run software applications, the software system comprising:

means for performing an inventory of the computer hardware component, to yield a set of computer hardware component features;

10    means for testing performance of the computer hardware component, to yield performance results for the set of computer hardware component features;

means for comparing the set of computer hardware component features and the performance results with capability rating level requirements; and

means for determining a capability rating level for the computer hardware

15    component based on the comparing.

48.    A software system for rating a computer system's ability to run software applications, wherein the rating facilitates matching of software application requirements with the computer system's capabilities, the software system comprising:

20    an inventory module;

a performance testing module; and

an inventory and performance evaluator module;

wherein the inventory and performance evaluator module compares:

a set of computer system features obtained by the inventory module;

25    performance results obtained by the performance testing module for the set of computer system features; and

rating level requirements, wherein the rating level requirements comprise a required set of features and required performance criteria; and

wherein the inventory and performance evaluator module determines a rating

30    level for the computer system based on the comparison.

49. The software system of claim 48 further comprising a graphical user interface for displaying rating information.

5      50. The software system of claim 49 wherein the displayed rating information includes rating level requirements.

51. The software system of claim 49 wherein the displayed rating information includes rating levels of individual components in the computer system.

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52. The software system of claim 49 wherein the displayed rating information includes a comparison of the performance results and the rating level requirements.

15      53. The software system of claim 49 wherein the displayed rating information includes recommended computer system upgrade information.